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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)  
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN CEDING POWERS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage June 3-5 on KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's last-minute decision to show up at a PFP-held demonstration Saturday, calling on President Chen Shui-bian to step down; the aftermath of Chen's announcement he will relinquish some powers; alleged involvement by Chen's son-in-law in the snowballing insider trading scandal; and personnel reshuffle of the National Security Council. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran an exclusive interview with Vice President Annette Lu on page two June 3; the banner headline said "Annette Lu: Su Tseng-chang Is Not the Successor Holding Substantive Powers." The same newspaper also ran a banner headline on page two June 4 that read "In Response to Wang Jin-pyng's Call: To Return to Constitutional Rule, Bian Intends to Let Majority Party Form Cabinet." The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a news story on page two June 4 that said "National Security Council Will Exercise Restraints with Regard to Gray Area in the Constitution."

In addition, several papers reported on the U.S. State Department's response to a reporter's inquiry June 1 with regard to Chen relinquishing some powers; a pro-unification "United Daily News" news story was headlined June 3 "Relinquishing Powers? United States Anticipates [Taiwan] Will Clarify [Matter] in Keeping with Constitution." The "Liberty Times" ran a news story on page two June 4 quoting Government Information Office Director-General Cheng Wen-tsan as saying the State Department's remarks showed that the United States has confidence in Taiwan's democratic society.

¶2. Several papers continued to editorialize on Chen's decision to relinquish powers. A "China Times" editorial said Taiwan has paid an expensive price for having the president relinquish powers that have never really belonged to him. A "China Times" opinion piece said the Bush administration is suspicious of Chen's decision to cede powers because Chen can regain control of national defense, diplomatic and cross-Straits issues anytime he wants. A "United Daily News" editorial said Chen has demonstrated two major things during his rule: namely, that Taiwan independence is not viable and that corruption is terrible. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said it is important to protect Taiwan's presidency, not Chen. Editorials in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" and "Taiwan News" both urged Chen to stay at his post and solve Taiwan's crisis through the democratic system. End summary.

A) "Questions Triggered by [Chen's] Announcement to 'Relinquish Powers'"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (6/3):

"... The show of [Chen] 'relinquishing powers' has indeed provided us with a topic for in-depth contemplation: that is, what is wrong with the current system? How can it allow a president to 'violate the Constitution and abuse powers' for six years without having the slightest power to restrain him? The predicament recently facing the opposition parties has proven that the current mechanism by which the Legislative Yuan can launch a recall, cast a no-confidence vote or impeach [the president] can do nothing to a president who has violated the Constitution and abused powers. The Judicial Yuan is practically not functioning any more; plus, given the criminal immunity enjoyed by the president, the judicial system can do nothing to him, either. If not for the media's increasingly significant coverage of the snowballing scandals involving Chen's close aides and family members, which triggered Taiwan people's swelling outrage and swelling sense of crisis of DPP members, who began to question the president's leadership and prestige, Chen would not have decided to 'relinquish his powers' before he is 'forced to step down.' The question is: Is it true that in the face of a president who has violated the Constitution and abused powers, we cannot force him to release his powers and follow only the Constitution after his prestige and integrity are strongly questioned? Isn't it an expensive constitutional price that, after having undergone such a painful process, we can only ask the president to give up powers that never belonged to him?"

B) "How Does the United States View the Bian-gate Case?"

Professor Edward Chen of Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of American Studies opined in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (6/3):

"... The Bush administration is suspicious of Chen Shui-bian's decision to relinquish powers because, according to the president's powers granted by the Constitution, Chen can remove the premier from his duties and regain control of defense, diplomatic and cross-strait issues any time he wants to. The first point of observation by the United States is thus how the DPP administration is going to handle direct transportation across the Taiwan Strait. The calls for normalizing direct chartered flights across the Taiwan Strait are mounting, and such a move can evidently diminish people's rage. But Washington believes that regular cross-Strait chartered flights alone cannot satisfy the needs of American and Taiwan businessmen and tourists. In addition, if concerns for national security can be put aside for direct cross-Strait chartered flights, there shouldn't be any concern for national security if the ban on cross-Strait direct transportation is lifted.

"Also, the Bush administration has deep doubts about Chen's political 'Dunkirk' this time. Given the unstable political situation Chen is currently in, Washington certainly does not believe he can stir up any more trouble. But if the opposition parties and some forces inside Taiwan that no longer support Chen fail to force him to step down during the period of 'Bian-gate' and let him get away with it, the Bush administration suspects that Chen will very likely throw out a referendum on a new constitution or other independence issues, which will help to re-organize support for Chen, sow discord between different ethnic groups and cause unification/independence conflicts, provoke Beijing and arouse tension across the Taiwan Strait. ..."

C) "Chen Shui-bian Has Demonstrated Two Things: Taiwan Independence Is Not Viable, and Black Gold Is Terrible!"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (6/5):

"During the past six years under Chen Shui-bian's rule, he has demonstrated two major things: Taiwan independence is not viable and 'black gold' is truly terrible! ... In reality, Chen is the one that has dealt a heavy blow to Taiwan independence. He not only suffered severe defeats with regard to a 'referendum,' 'writing a new constitution,' and 'scrapping the National Unification Council and its guidelines,' but he has made Washington view him, the Taiwan independence leader, as totally unreasonable. Taiwan independence was at least a shining bubble in the past, but Chen has personally poked and broken it. Chen, who is well-versed at toying with Taiwan independence, has destroyed it himself. What a historical paradox! ...

"As for the terrible black gold, Chen's greediness and corruption can be found everywhere and anywhere. ... What we saw now is just the tip of the iceberg. Chen's two major political banners used to be to remove black gold and push for Taiwan independence. But now he has become the number one black gold in Taiwan's political history, and the terminator of Taiwan independence. ..."

D) "It Is Important to Protect the Office, Not the Person"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] said in an editorial (6/5):

"Over recent days, as scandals involving immediate family members and aides to President Chen Shui-bian have snowballed, more opposition lawmakers have called for the president's recall or impeachment. Kuomintang Chairman Ma Ying-jeou, the mayor of Taipei who is most likely to run for the presidency in 2008, has spoken out against attempts to remove President Chen from power. While Ma's views have wrought scorn from many 'pan-blue' lawmakers, we believe Ma's view is the correct one for several reasons. ...

"While much has been said about the prospect of showing President Chen the door, we believe people on all sides of the argument should think less about President Chen himself, and more about the office and institution that is the Presidency of the Republic of China. ... At the same time, President Chen should at least try to stop inflicting permanent damage on the presidency through his own unconstitutional actions."

E) "Chen Should Stay Where He Is"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] wrote in an editorial (6/4):

"In the wake of controversy surrounding the investigation of President Chen Shui-bian's son-in-law Chao Chien-ming, the president on Wednesday announced he would delegate some powers. The move is an interim arrangement that should be welcomed for the minimal disruption it will cause to Taiwanese society. With less than two years left in Chen's second term, and in light of the fact that no evidence has been unearthed so far to suggest that the president has been involved in any wrongdoing, to insist that the president resign or face recall - as suggested by the pan-blue opposition - would likely do more harm than good to the name. ...

"The criticisms against President Chen for 'illegitimately' releasing his powers are unfair, to say the least. There is no clear delineation of powers between the president and the premier in the current Constitution. The Constitution gives Taiwan a government that is neither a pure presidential nor a pure Cabinet system. Precedent has dictated most of the president's powers. However, Ma has much to worry about with this shift, because once this norm is established, it will have an impact on the division of power between the next president and his or her premier."

F) "Democratic System Offers Best Way to Resolve Crisis"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (6/5):

"We strongly urge President Chen Shui-bian and the Democratic Progressive Party administration to firmly reject calls by the conservative pan-Kuomintang opposition to resign and instead allow our judicial and constitutional systems to operate. ... We also urge the KMT and its ally the People First Party to display respect for our judicial system and democratic constitutional system and refrain from reviving their six-year campaign to drive Chen from office by extra-constitutional means. ...

"In sum, we must not allow disappointment in the performance of President Chen to be used as fodder for another drive to undermine our hard-won democratic constitutional system, judicial independence and protection for basic human rights. Instead, only by relying on our democratic political processes, including the change of government through regular elections, and the independent and impartial operation of the judiciary will Taiwan be able to pass through the latest transitional crisis of our young democracy."

